The following article appears Courtesy of Outdoor Guide Magazine, in which it was originally published.
Outdoor Guide covers hunting, fishing, camping and boating in Missouri and Illinois.

For a free copy call 800-706-2444.

Town & Country Continues to Torture Deer

By Steve Jones, Guide Conservation Editor

You simply cannot believe what they are doing to deer in Town and Country.

You may recall this is the St. Louis County suburban community which sought to deal with their deer overpopulation problem by the expensive and questionable practice of 'trap and transplant'. The Missouri Conservation Commission granted them permission, based on using the opportunity to research the effects of trap and transplant on whitetails in Missouri.

During early 1999 eighty deer were captured. Each was fitted with a radio collar, and released in a conservation area in southern Missouri.

Within a month, over twenty per-cent of the relocated deer had died of an affliction called 'capture myopathy'. This condition has long been known to wildlife managers, and is a common side effect of the stresses of capture and relocation. It affects different species in different ways and to different degrees. Whitetail deer are exceptionally prone to capture myopathy, and the physical manifestation of the condition in whitetail is gruesome beyond belief.

The symptoms progress over days and weeks following the release, though if fatal, the deer always dies within a month. It begins with apparent stiffness and discomfort in the hindquarters, slowly progressing to final paralysis, usually accompanied by renal (kidney) failure.

Autopsies show extremely degraded muscles and connective tissue, particularly in the back and hindquarters, and often thoroughly destroyed kidney tissue.

This is almost certainly a death marked by extreme, prolonged, relentless pain. Yet the worst is that, in the end, afflicted deer may be attacked by scavengers who take advantage of the deer's crippled condition. If they find the deer still alive, they are not hesitant to begin feeding without

regard for the fact that the deer may still have its head up.

Clearly this is an experiment that Town & Country would want to abandon, right? Wrong.

This year, Town & Country sought to trap and transplant another 150 deer (at city taxpayer expense), though they actually managed less than half that.

A delegation from Town & Country, including a Ms. Jeanne Martin and Ms. Brunilda Perez, addressed the Missouri Conservation Commissioners at the February 2000 Commission meeting.

Were they there to find out how to reduce myopathy, or explore more humane methods of dealing with their deer overpopulation problems? No such luck. What they had to say revealed pervasive self-delusion, and profound ignorance of whitetail biology.

They were there to protest the fact that the deer were located in an area in which hunting is legal! It seems they would prefer they be located in an area in which deer are not hunted. Of course, any such areas are already suffering under an overpopulation problem. Apparently Town & Country politicians are content to simply move their problem to someone else's back yard.

It is true that an unusually large percentage of the transplanted deer were taken during the fall hunting season, since the sudden presence of 80 collared deer attracted a fair amount of local attention at the relocation site. But the collars were a one-time part of the research project, so this should not happen again.

Some of what they said defies belief. This, from Ms. Martin: "These deer are very human entities. And to just throw them out into places with people who want to hunt them, it really doesn't give them a fair chance at making their place in life."

Or this: "The translocated deer already come from a protected area so we don't see any problem with putting them into another protected area." which clearly states their willingness to simply relocate the problem rather than solving it.

The Conservation Commissioners expressed dismay that Town & Country was relocating bucks as well as does. Even basic knowledge of whitetail biology tells you that since the cost is so high, and since does are the key to controlling whitetail populations, you would release the bucks immediately and focus on trapping more does.

When questioned about this, Ms. Brunilda Perez said (I am not making this up) "It was in the interest of keeping the most humane approach that

family groups should be moved together. Many people, remember this has a human dimension, many people felt that the fawns, whether they were does or bucks, should be moved along with the mother."

Astonishing. They are thinking in cartoons rather than science. Recall that the transplants are taking place in January and February, when young deer have been out of spots and weaned for half a year or so. Adult does have long since kicked their male progeny out of their range. Juvenile does are already assuming their role in the 'pecking order' of the whitetail matriarchy, and have not depended in any way on their 'mother' for months.

As for why they are moving mature bucks as well, we can only assume they want the relocated deer to have a strong father figure. This would be funny if there was not so much inhumane suffering as a result.

In the Commission meeting they even sought to blame hunters for the capture myopathy! Commenting on the benefits of selecting an unhunted relocation site, Ms. Clayton dropped this pearl of whitetail biology wisdom: "...the stress should be less so we might even see a decrease in the capture myopathy that we've seen before because of fewer hunters... and turkey hunters..."

Apparently she would have us believe that a deer relocated in February which dies of capture myopathy in March, would somehow be saved if there had not been a deer hunter in the woods four months earlier. Or if there would not be a turkey hunter in the woods a month or so after the deer died. These people are making it up as they go along.

It is natural for a conservationist to abhor this situation. If my gun or bow caused the sort of suffering that Town & Country is inflicting on these magnificent animals, I would have hung them up long ago. There is no inconsistency with having venison in your freezer and taking exception to the inhumane behavior of Town & Country.

Despite their awful decisions, one cannot deny that Town & Country politicians truly face a serious problem.

Many of their constituents express naive desires such as 'let nature take its course.' But when it comes to whitetails, nature left town along with the wolves, cougars and bears which they evolved alongside.

It is quite simple. If you have deer, something other than old age and BMW's had better be killing them or you have too many deer.

What few understand is that once whitetails reach a level that impacts the quality of their habitat, they are like an invisible forest fire that just keeps burning and burning. Though wooded areas may look fine to the untrained eye, they can be a biological desert from the perspective of the myriad

species that depend on a healthy, diverse understory.

It is time for Town & Country to face facts. They have too many deer. It is an ecologically, economically and politically unsustainable situation. Nature has no tools to correct the situation, unless of course they want to reintroduce wolves or cougars. That would certainly add an interesting dimension to time spent waiting for a school bus in Town & Country.

They must reduce the herd to appropriate levels, and must undertake sufficient annual management to keep it there. Their preferred method of capture and relocation has clearly been shown to be inhumane, not to mention extremely expensive.

There are only three tools available to suburban deer managers. Bowhunting, which is not practical when most of the habitat is in densely settled areas. Professional sharpshooting, which is pretty expensive, and politically difficult to sell since most people do not understand it can be safely conducted. And there is the only real solution for Town & Country, trap and euthanize. This is the only practical, humane tool which can accomplish the level of reduction they need.

Instead of spending $400 a head to torture these animals, they should spend far less arranging for the meat to be processed and donated to the St. Louis Area Food Bank, which will ensure it gets to the homes of families *who cannot typically afford fresh red meat.*

In the real world, there is no other humane, ecologically sound option. There is no place to put Town & Country's deer where they will not die. Only Disney could do that.

It is time for the Conservation Commission to pull the plug on the relocation permit. Enough is enough. The deer deserve better, and the clear message should be sent to other suburban communities in St. Louis and around the state that relocation is not a practical, humane option for dealing with the growing suburban whitetail problem.

It is also time for Town & Country to switch off the TV and grow up. In the real world, things die.

Return to MFAO Homepage

Deerfarmer.com
Deer Farmers' Information Network

Deer Farmers' Digest Newsletter

ISSN 1499-1349 Vol. 2, No. 9 September 2001

Welcome to the SEPTEMBER 2001 edition of the *Deer Farmers' Digest*, a monthly electronic newsletter published for those interested in raising deer, elk and reindeer. This *Digest* (ISSN 1499-1357) is distributed via e-mail to over 2,600 readers in 25 countries. A copy of ALL the issues of the *Deer Farmers' Digest* can be found at *http://digest.deerfarmer.com* and in the National Library of Canada at *http://collection.nlc-bnc.ca/100/201/300/deer_farmers_digest/*.

Please forward this copy of the *Deer Farmers' Digest* to your friends and any other people who may be interested in deer, elk or reindeer. To ADD or REMOVE your name from our mailing list, please see Subscription Services below.

IN THIS ISSUE

1. WHY DEER DIE

[*Prepared from notes taken at presentations by Dr. Jerry Haigh and Dr. Murray Woodbury at the Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer Association conference in April 2001*].

In the fall of 2000, Dr. John Berezowski of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (Saskatoon, Canada) sent out a survey to identify what diseases affect the deer industry in Canada and the United States. Some 167 deer/elk farmers (32% of the total sample) and 8 veterinary labs returned the surveys. The total numbers of deer/elk upon which the results are based was approximately 5,200.

The study found the following death rates – 22% among fawns, 5% among yearlings and 4% among adults.

Deaths occurred during birthing – 2.9% among adult does, 2.2% among yearlings and 27% in assisted births. Assistance is necessary during problem births, so it should be expected that there will be some mortality.

The study found that fawn survival rates were 89% to one month, 82% to weaning and 78% to one year of age. When fawns die, some 49% do so within the first month. From a production standpoint, care for fawns during their first month is critical to ensure high survival rates.

According to this study, there were two major causes of death in deer and elk – emaciation and trauma.

The major causes for emaciation were:

- improper nutrition
- parasites – brown stomach worm (important to de-worm)
- behavioural causes – the "pecking" order
- problems with teeth
- unspecified disease
- capture myopathy
- MCF – possibly a new strain of virus
- grain overload
- other – usually some infectious diseases.

The study found that deer and elk farmers need to pay more attention to handling of animals. Too many animals are injured or killed during handling. Farmers must have facilities that reduce risk of injury or death to the animals. Training is also important – for both the farmers and the animals. "Trained" animals are easier and safer to handle. (See *Sending Deer to School* in the July 2000 *Digest* located at *http://digest.deerfarmer.com/jul00.htm*)

Capture myopathy

The study found that mortality due to capture myopathy was 6% among fawns, 12.5% among yearlings and 20.6% among adults.

Capture myopathy (or white muscle disease) is a response by the deer to stressors in its environment. The type of response to stress is affected by several factors – species, age, previous experiences, general health, genetics and learned/innate behaviour.

The immediate reaction to stress is the "fight or flight" syndrome. The adrenals secrete adrenaline. Persistent stress raises reaction to a dangerous level.

The mid-term effects of stress are: a) release of ACTH from the pituitary gland, b) the animal is on high alert, c) the animal becomes worn out, and d) the deer becomes susceptible to disease.

Severe stress over days or weeks can cause chronic corticosteroid production and adrenal exhaustion. The secondary effects include metabolic upset, loss of body condition, loss of reproduction, and increased susceptibility to stress and death.

Stress causes anaerobic metabolism, which results in chemically stored energy, lactic acid and cramping and muscle damage. Lactic acid damage contributes to capture myopathy.

Capture myopathy is a syndrome of acute or chronic degradation resulting from stressful activity such as a pursuit of the susceptible animal. It can occur without exercise (animal does not have to

be chased). Capture myopathy can occur both during physical and chemical restraint. It occurs in most animals, but especially in ungulates. It has been reported in birds and even fish.

Fear and anxiety plus excessive body heat plus too much adrenaline will result in capture myopathy.

The clinical signs of capture myopathy include sudden death within 24 hours, depression, rapid shallow breathing, and failure to recover from anesthesia. Death can occur after several hours of symptoms, or from cardiac arrest. The animal may also appear to recover, but has heart damage. It may die at the next stressful event.

Other symptoms include stiffness or lameness, swollen muscles and brown urine (due to myoglobin excretion which may lead to damage of the kidneys).

There is no treatment for capture myopathy. Therefore, prevention is critical. This can be done through good planning, good facilities and trained animal handlers.

Minimize the time of restraint. Some vets use anti-psychotic handling drugs. Long lasting tranquilizers are useful for translocation and prolonged handling. Keep the duration of immobilization as short as possible, and reverse it.

Selenium and Vitamin E deficiency can contribute to capture myopathy. Be sure that your animals are getting adequate amounts in their diet.

Don't handle or immobilize animals in the heat of the day. This significantly increases the risks. Also, if you have to redo immobilization, then just quit, the risk is too great.

Good production and management techniques require the minimization of animal mortality. Addressing the issues discussed will assist farmers to increase production and the profitability of their operations.

2. DEER FARMING IN NEW ZEALAND

[*Information provided by Dr. Philip Theunissen, South Africa, Dick Valentine of the New Zealand Fallow Deer Society, and the New Zealand Game Industry Board web site – http://www.nzgib.org.nz*]

Deer farming originated in New Zealand, and this country remains the world's largest and most advanced in this specialized agricultural pursuit.

There are more than 4,000 deer farms in New Zealand, ranging in size from small hobby farms to extensive commercial operations. On these farms are approximately 1.8 million deer, or half the world's farmed deer population. This figure includes an estimated 1.2 million female deer (hinds or cows) and 600,000 stags and bulls.

Deer are not native to New Zealand. The first deer were imported from England and Scotland for sport in the mid to late 19th century. The deer were released mainly in the Southern Alps and its

7. DEER CAPTURE METHODS AND POST-CAPTURE TREATMENT

The most recent advances in capturing feral deer have been made in New Zealand. Deer can be captured by a multitude of methods, but helicopters have been most widely used in New Zealand. A new innovation has been to shoot a combination drug-dart and radio transmitter dart from a shotgun at a deer to be captured. However, this method requires skill in the interpretation of radio signals and drug handling. Deer are also trapped in nets ejected from the undercarriage of a helicopter, but this method is somewhat dangerous to both deer and catchers. Another method is to jump upon a deer from a helicopter after which it is physically wrestled and restrained. This method is mainly used for capturing fawns. Recently, electrical immobilising apparatus has been used from helicopters.

Trap pens with trip wires or other non-return devices are an effective and popular means of capturing deer. Pens may be 'baited' with crops such as swedes or lucerne, or during the rut, with a female. Deer can be driven into traps by the use of helicopters, motorcycles, four-wheel drive vehicles, dogs and/or horses.

The most important problem associated with capture is stress, which often results in post capture myopathy and death. It is therefore important to make every effort to prevent this from occurring. The following approaches will reduce stress:

- refrain from chemically immobilising a deer which has been chased too long or too far;
- if the drug Fentanyl is used, administer an antidote rapidly;
- blindfold or hood a captured deer to quieten it; this also protects the face;
- if a deer is to be moved from the point of capture under a helicopter, enclose it entirely in a large bag;
- place deer in a darkened, well-ventilated truck for road transport;
- after capture, hold deer in a darkened shed for 1 – 2 days, feed and water them, and preferably release them at dusk.

A trap commonly used in New Zealand is constructed of netting with a maximum mesh of 0.3 m and a height of 1.9 m. The most popular pen size is 40 × 20 m. The gates are light and strong, and are made of pipe and netting, preferably diamond mesh. They are selfclosing and are triggered by a fine wire or string connected to a release catch. The wire is set out into the pen across the gateway about 0.5 to 0.6 m off the ground; deer entering the pen trip the wire and the gate closes. A butterfly catch holds the gate shut in the event of the deer hitting it in trying to escape.

To remove deer from the trap, a 10 cm mesh net, about 3.2 m long and 1.9 m high, is erected with one end tied to a post, and the deer are driven into this net. Before captured deer are

released into paddocks, it is advisable to hold them for about three days in a close-walled, covered pen and to walk through them at intervals to allow them to get used to human beings. After this, the deer should be released into a paddock at night.

The following methods are used for capturing musk deer:

- Chasing: This results in few injuries and high survival rate but is labour intensive;
- Noosing: This is economical and easy, with a high capture but low survival rate;
- Net-catching: Gives a better survival rate than noosing, but requires much care;
- Trapping: With this method the survival rate is high but it requires much manpower.

Musk deer are transported in cages 100 × 50 × 75 cm, with an entrance on one side. During transport the cage should be covered with cloth.

Newly captured musk deer should be kept in a dark, quiet and narrow shed and be fed twice a day with small amounts of grass and water. When they have become accustomed to captivity, they can be released during the day, but have to be shut in at night.

7.1 Drugs Used in Immobilising and Capturing Deer

A variety of drugs is available for the immobilisation and capture of deer. All drugs should be used with caution and the operator should acquire a thorough knowledge of damage and antidote rates before application. Some drugs can only be used by veterinarians. There may also be legal requirements to be complied with in the aquisition, possession and use of certain immobilising agents, particularly those that are classified as dangerous drugs in many countries, such as morphine derivatives.

Most ingredients used in tranquilising darts are either analgetics or sedatives, sometimes applied in combination with tranquilizers. The analgetics are pain relievers, the sedatives enhance sleepiness and the tranquilizers influence the 'psyche'.

Drugs used in New Zealand for immobilization of red deer include Xylazine ('Rompun', Bayer) and a Fentanyl-Azaperone mixture ('Fentaz', Ethnor Ltd.). Intra muscular dose rates used for red deer are:

Rompun 0.2–5.5 mg/kg (average 0.4 mg/kg) liveweight.

Fentaz 2.0–4.0 ml/100 kg of liveweight.

Both Rompun and Fentaz are required in higher doses on the open range and also for stressed animals.

Fentaz is the drug of choice for capture of red deer by helicopter as its effect is relatively consistent and rapid and an antidote is available. Dose rates of 1 ml/45 kg are recommended for quiet farmed deer and of 1 ml/22 kg for range deer. Xylazine is a slowacting sedative with a considerable safety margin. No antidote can be used with it. Male deer require a higher dosing rate than females.

Fallow deer react differently to drugs than other deer, although a fentanyl in combination with xylazine or azaperone may be used. In New Zealand etorphine with xylazine, in a dose of 2 mg/100 kg body weight for etorphine and 30 mg/100 kg for xylazine are used. In Canada, fentanyl was used in conjunction with either xylazine or azaperone (Haigh, 1977). Jones (1972) used valium (= diazepam) and librium as tranquilizers for moving deer.

Both overdosing (causing breathing depression) and underdosing (causing exhaustion, excitation and hyperthermy) are dangerous.

It should be realised that the drugs routinely used by deer farmers and capturers are potentially lethal because they are readily absorbed through tissues into the blood stream.

Tranquillisers are relatively slow in action and are therefore used in handling rather than actual capture. They are safe, devoid of side effects, and render the animal easier to handle. Their action is generally prolonged, which is a desirable feature for the handling of deer. Best of all, deer have wide dose tolerances of them and they are safe from the human point of view.

Intramuscular injection of immobilizing drugs is effected by syringe if deer are confined to yards. With free ranging or paddocked animals, drugs are administered either by tranquillizer dart guns or by blow darts. The major advantage of a blow dart in confined areas is its lack of noise and hence the decreased likelihood of panic and trampling. Another simple and very effective apparatus in appropriate situations is a syringe with an extended plunger handle, consisting of a piece of wooden dowel about 1 m in length glued to the plunger.

It is important to ensure correct projection of darts for the species concerned because considerable tissue injury is caused by darts which are fired at too high a velocity.

Policy Promotes Urban Deer Partnerships

Growing deer populations pose a growing problem for city governments. The Conservation Department helps find solutions.

By Tony Kalna

Missourians are seeing more deer today than ever before, and they're seeing them in places they never would have guessed. In the past year, news media have carried stories of deer crashing through plate-glass windows in shopping centers, devouring hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of crops, orchard trees and landscape plantings. Most often, the stories involve deer struck by vehicles. The results are always expensive and sometimes fatal for both deer and people.

The Missouri Insurance Information Service recorded 8,651 deer/vehicle accidents in 1998, up from 8,111 the previous year. While Missouri's deer/car problems are growing, they pale in comparison to the hazards motorists face in other states. Neighboring Illinois has nearly twice as many deer/vehicle accidents as Missouri. Wisconsin records more than 40,000 such accidents annually, Michigan, more than 65,000. In the northeastern United States, deer cause more than $665 million in auto damages annually.

Hunting is the conservation Department's most effective, practical tool for keeping deer numbers in balance with people's economic and safety needs. But in urban areas, where hunting may be impractical for safety reasons or because of public opinion, the Conservation Department works with private landowners and local governments to find other ways of meeting its deer management responsibilities.

An urban deer management policy adopted by the Conservation Commission at its August 1999 meeting provides guidelines for such cooperative efforts. The policy provides guidelines for Conservation Department biologists in the St. Louis, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Columbia/Jefferson City and Springfield/Joplin areas to help keep deer numbers in balance with available habitat and citizens' needs. Implementing such management plans on land not owned by the Conservation Department is the responsibility of local organizations.

The policy directs Conservation Department wildlife research biologists to lend their expertise in assessing deer populations and selecting the best ways to reduce deer numbers. They also are to help measure the success of whatever strategies are selected.

In areas where the Conservation Department has urban wildlife biologists, they are to help resolve conflicts, obtain necessary permits and meet other administrative needs. Conservation Department regional information specialists are responsible for helping build public understanding of deer management problems and solutions.

Potential solutions include non-lethal measures, such as using repellents, fencing, trapping and relocation, reproductive control and

a Bounty of Food

Missouri Wildlife Artist Scores Big in the Bow Woods

modifying habitat. Lethal measures include managed hunting, sharpshooting and euthanasia.

Reproductive control by use of contraceptives is strictly regulated under federal law and is not legal in most situations. Methods currently available are neither cost effective nor biologically feasible. However, some may hold promise for urban deer population control in the future.

The only other method of reproductive control currently available is to capture deer and sterilize them surgically. This is extremely expensive. Furthermore, it is ineffective in most cases because of the difficulty of treating enough deer and preventing other deer from migrating in from surrounding land. this method also causes a high rate of death from "capture myopathy," a condition that arises from the stress of being trapped and handled.

The St. Louis suburb of Town and Country is one community where the conservation Department is working with local officials to test alternative methods of deer population control. The experiment involves trapping deer and relocating them to a conservation area.

The city hired a private wildlife damage control company to do the trapping. The first year's effort netted 51 female deer, far short of the 122 does that biologists say must be removed for two or three years in a row to get local deer numbers under control. Conservation Department biologists say the removal of 51 does approximately offsets fawn production in the area this year.

The relocation effort didn't save all the relocated deer's lives, either. One in five died within weeks of relocation. The primary causes of death was capture myopathy.

Other Missouri towns are grappling with similar deer population problems. The Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department has been using a special, managed muzzleloader hunt to control deer number in 7,800-acre Fleming Park. This differs significantly from Town and Country, where the deer must be removed from private residential neighborhoods.

The city of Columbia allows archery deer hunting within the city limits, so individual landowners who obtain permits can reduce local deer numbers this way.

The city of Boonville recently decided to thin its growing deer herd by means of professional sharpshooters. This practice is common in the eastern United States. It is effective and economical. It also is humane, resulting in quick death, rather than subjecting deer to the extended stress of capture and resulting illness. In some communities, meat from deer taken by sharpshooters is donated to food banks to benefit the needy.

Home :: Join :: Magazine :: Photos :: Links :: Merchandise :: Big Buck Contest :: Contact

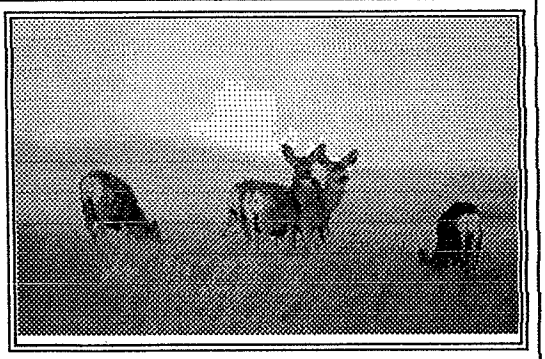
Sign the Guestbook View the Guestbook

From: Ken Waldrup <kenw@f...>
Date: Fri Sep 22, 2000 9:27 pm
Subject: Re: [deermail2] Capture myopathy

>Capture myopathy can be expressed weeks after acute stress but how many
>weeks would be an upper limit?
>
>_____
>Robert J Hudson
>Associate Dean (Academic and International Programs)
>Facuty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics
>AgFor 2-14, University of Alberta
>Edmonton, Canada T6G 2P5

Dear Dr. Hudson,
From my own experience, I have seen capture myopathy expressed at least 3 weeks (with lab reports) post-stress and possibly up to 5 weeks (unsubstantiated, no lab reports). Take care.
Ken Waldrup

Ken Waldrup, DVM, PhD
Field Veterinarian, Area 3
Texas Animal Health Commisssion
kenw@f...



The Deer Of Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Magazine
April 1997

Text by Ken Bouc. Illustrations by Duane Westerholt

Whitetails and Mule Deer | Special Characteristics | Setting Deer Seasons
Deer Research | Deer Diseases | Urban Deer

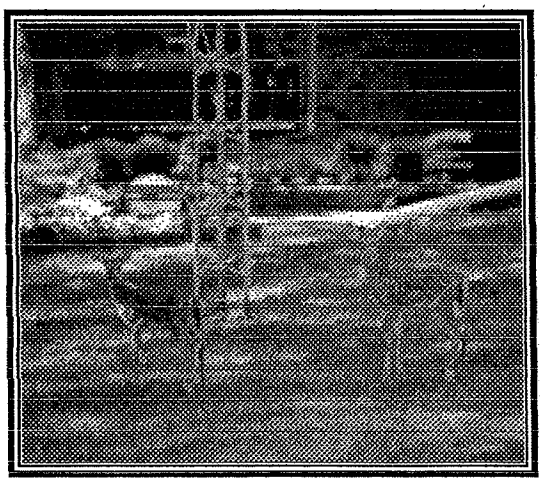
Urban Deer

Problems with unwanted deer in urban areas appear to be almost inevitable, even in Nebraska, if the experience of Eastern cities is any indication.

Decades ago, white-tailed deer began to become a problem in suburbs carved into the woodlands of Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan and other Eastern and Midwestern states. Whitetails ate shrubs and flowers in yards, damaged automobiles on freeways and occasionally shattered a patio door or splashed into a pool. Most people believed the occurrences were simply the result of humans invading deer territory.

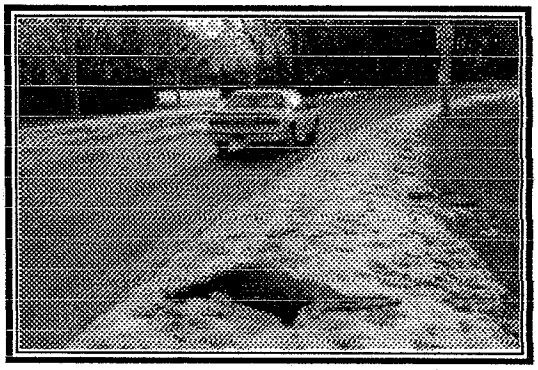
By the time cities, including Minneapolis, Des Moines and Omaha, began having similar experiences, however, the problem was better understood. Whitetails were breeding, giving birth, raising fawns and living their entire lives within city limits. Suburbs had not only invaded deer habitat, they had become deer habitat.

Many people no longer see the deer in their neighborhoods as the enchanting creatures of children's fantasies and cartoons. Deer in cities disfigure or kill trees and shrubs around homes and destroy gardens. Deer damage cars, endanger travelers on the highways and pose an extreme hazard on airport runways. Calls to police, fire departments and animal control agencies about dead, injured or panicky deer add to demands on local governments.



Modern urban development patterns contribute much to the problem. Developments usually are on the edge of cities, adjacent to rural deer populations. Their large lots and numerous green spaces, often along waterways lined with trees and shrubs, are good deer habitat. Waterways also serve as corridors along which deer travel deeper into the city, where they find parks, cemeteries and golf courses, pockets of deer habitat completely ringed by urban development.

Nebraska's first significant urban deer problem surfaced in the mid-1980s in the Bellevue area, where development had enclosed seven square miles of forested bluffs and river bottom within a loop of the Missouri River. By 1994, the deer population was two or three times the recommended level. Deer were eating gardens and landscape plants in the neighborhoods, having already nibbled away most of the seedlings, shrubs and other understory plants in the forest, damage that will take many years to heal. Collisions with deer on roadways tripled in a 10-year period.



Highway traffic, a busy railroad track at the base of the bluffs and limited archery and muzzleloader hunting on the 1,300-acre Gifford Point Wildlife Management Area bordering the river were insufficient controls on the deer population. Fontenelle Forest Nature Center, with 1,300 acres of upland and floodplain forest adjoining Bellevue, now has begun managed hunting to help control the herd. Potential deer problems also have been simmering in Lincoln's Wilderness Park, a six-mile band of deer habitat along Salt Creek that extends into southwestern Lincoln from the south. Wilderness Park maintains a deer population estimated at 225 to 300 animals.

Development has increasingly crowded the narrow strip of cover along Salt Creek, soon to be bounded on four sides by housing, apartment complexes and other urban development near the city and small homesteads and acreages farther south. Wilderness Park's deer are nearly bottled up, with their only outlet several miles to the south along the narrow creek corridor.

Nebraska's urban deer problem is relatively small compared to those in other states, yet some areas bear watching. City parks in Omaha have a potential for deer problems, as does an area in Nebraska City adjoining the Missouri River. Airports, in Omaha, Lincoln, North Platte, Alliance and elsewhere are potential trouble spots. All over the state, even in the sparsely populated Sandhills, communities have lost gardens, trees and nursery stock to hungry deer.

Complaints of damage caused by deer are referred to Game and Parks Commission district offices in Lincoln, Norfolk, Kearney, Bassett, North Platte and Alliance. In most cases, advice from the Commission helps homeowners and suburban businesses handle the problem themselves.

They can, for example, use landscape plants that deer don't like or enclose plants in wire or plastic protectors. Electric fencing provides inexpensive protection for moderate-size areas. Other special fencing and gates can keep deer away, and deer can be repelled with chemical repellents or garlic capsules. Noisemaking devices provide temporary relief, but are inappropriate in urban contexts and are effective only until deer become accustomed to the noise. Repellents and scare devices usually are

temporary solutions, since they simply move problems elsewhere. Although expensive, an effective and permanent solution for large areas, such as nurseries and parks, is a 10-foot tall, deer-proof fence made of welded-wire mesh or mesh and smooth or barbed wire. For nurseries and orchards where buck "rubbing" and browsing can ruin expensive trees and shrubs, such a fence can be justified.

When public safety is involved, such as at airports, the Commission becomes directly involved. Often, most of the problem is caused by only one or two deer in the area, and removal of the animals solves the problem for a time.

Hunting is an inexpensive and effective way to reduce the deer population in a given area, and archery is particularly useful near housing developments and in removing specific problem animals like those in Fontenelle Forest near Bellevue.

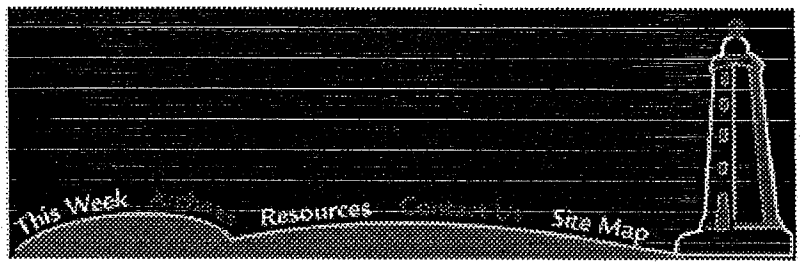
Other methods for dealing with urban deer problems are often suggested as more modern or humane, but most have serious flaws. Chemical birth control to reduce deer populations, for example, is expensive, works slowly and is almost impossible to administer to wild deer in proper dosages. The drugs, which have not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, also could be passed along the food chain or to humans.

Trapping and relocating deer is sometimes proposed, but it costs as much as $400 per animal, and up to 60 percent of the deer die from the stress of capture, handling and relocation. Relocation is particularly difficult because of the scarcity of places where more deer will be welcome.

Urban sprawl is likely to continue, and so will deer problems, especially in eastern Nebraska and in the eastern United States. Western cities have fewer deer problems, since mule deer are less tolerant of humans than whitetails are.

In that might lie a clue to understanding the urban deer dilemma. The resilient whitetail has again done what it has done so well in the past. In learning to tolerate humans and to live in the city, it has developed yet another survival technique and adapted to a new habitat.

Go To Top



Search our Site

January 29, 2003

No group has monopoly on hunting skills

Commentary by JIM LAWRENCE
Special to The Independent

There are many animals that thrive in close proximity to people. Raccoons, coyotes, and strangely enough, whitetail deer are good examples. Populations of these animals have exploded in the past 100 years and areas that did not have large numbers now abound with those masked marauders, sly scavengers and beautiful browsers.

The reasons are simple. Humans discard lots of food, munchies for raccoons and coyotes, and have eliminated the major predators that control whitetail deer populations.

It is no wonder that in an area like Presqu'ile Park, where hunting is banned, where there are no natural predators, the deer herd has grown out of proportion to the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. In other words: there are just too many deer.

Presqu'ile is a closed ecosystem. The herd is insulated from the rest of Brighton Township by the long, narrow shape of the peninsula (it's almost an island) and by the large, saturated residential area at the top. The deer herd does not move in and out of the area but remains confined. Thus the growth of the herd due to ample food and no predation is understandable. To avoid mass starvation, when the herd grows past the availability of food, the number of whitetail deer must be reduced. I cannot accept starvation as an acceptable, compassionate solution.

Although birth control drugs are successful in penned animals, delivering the drug to wild animals is difficult and impossible to control. Catching and caging whitetails for relocation has

proven disastrous, as their nervous system overloads and results in a high rate of mortality. Even if it were possible to relocate deer, who would accept them?

The only proven method of reducing a herd is by shooting excess animals. It remains necessary for humans to take the place of bears, wolves, and cougars in the natural scheme of life and death. Tough love indeed, but needed to maintain healthy numbers.

The only conundrum is who should be picked to do the cull? Choosing members of the Mohawk community in Tyendinaga was the solution of the Park's management.

When some members of that community are still in court for participating in their own deer cull at Presqu'ile, being charged with illegal hunting by the Ministry of Natural Resources, it seems an unusual choice. I'm sure the lawyer for those being charged is now grinning like a 'possum eating bumblebees ... how can it be illegal one day and not illegal the next?

Deciding to use Mohawk hunters because of historic rights seems odd as well. Considering the historic rights of the natives to hunt in their beaver-trapping lands is also in court, and a recently discovered map of those territories seems to indicate Presqu'ile was never included in their traditional territory, it would seem again the Park's management has jumped the gun. (Excuse the pun.)

These days there is no monopoly on hunting skills that can be claimed by any one group. There are excellent, safe hunters of all sizes, shapes and ancestral backgrounds. Making certain the cull was safe for Presqu'ile residents could have been a priority no matter who was on the other end of the rifles.

There are many hunters and venison lovers in the area, who are not aboriginal, who deserved an opportunity to participate in the deer cull.

A chance to share in a draw for a controlled hunt, open to both natives and non-natives alike, would have been a more impartial way to determine those who would take part in the cull, and a method of selection that would not seem to put closure to existing legal activity.

Jim Lawrence, a hunter and fisherman, is a past editor of The Independent, present Editor of the COHA Field News (the journal of the Canadian Outdoor Heritage Alliance), a Field Editor for Outdoor Canada Magazine and a member of the

Outdoor Writers of Canada.

Home • This Week • Archives • Resources • Contact Us • Site Map

webmaster@eastnorthumberland.com.

| top |